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*a magazine for marketers*  
VOLUME 4  
ISSUE 4  
SEPTEMBER 2008



**With every issue, *Deliver* works hard** to bring you some of the smartest and most colorful successes in direct marketing. This time, though, we've made an even bolder, more concerted effort to underscore and celebrate the creative potential of direct marketing.

The reason we did this is simple: Far too many marketers still don't appreciate the untapped creative power of traditional media.

Sure, it's imperative to understand the science of reaching customers. But good marketing can also be an art and, like all good art, can inspire or provoke in ways that are heartfelt and meaningful.

We underscore this idea with our feature "Master Pieces" (p. 9). This story examines how a variety of businesses benefit from creating mail pieces that wind up on office walls, refrigerators and other places where recipients often admire them years after the direct marketing message has lost relevance. Certainly, the first purpose of a direct marketing offer is to get our customers to do business with us. But secondarily, we want to find ways to get them to remember our brand long after the offer is over. So it certainly doesn't hurt to have your mail piece — complete with your brand and logo — hanging in a customer's office for months or years, even. Talk about engagement!

Of course, creative mail isn't always treated as a favorite painting. Sometimes, it just makes for plain old fun. Take, for instance, a campaign by building-materials manufacturer BuildDirect, which we spotlight in "Spreading the Floor" (p. 12). The company

scored big with its audience by sending out wooden mazes made of the same top-flight bamboo flooring product that the mailing promoted. Not only did the mazes provide mail recipients with a light-hearted diversion, they also cut through the marketing clutter and brought home the ease with which BuildDirect could help its coveted B-to-B customers make smart flooring choices.

We also visit two bastions of creativity, Hollywood and Broadway, to give you a glimpse into how movie and theater marketers juggle a series of ever-shifting demands to promote the latest hit films and plays ("Audience Participation," p. 14). Here, ROI isn't just measured in calls or click-throughs, but in awards nominations, too.

Not to be outdone, television networks are also investing heavily in imaginative, eye-catching marketing efforts. HBO, for example, struck gold with a mail-centered promotional effort ("Premium Channel," p. 20) designed to win more viewers for its popular series "Big Love." To push the show, about a polygamist patriarch in Utah, the network mailed viewers mock invitations to nuptials between the man ... and his three wives. Needless to say, the invitations turned heads and made more than a few people tune in.

Any number of factors can influence how well a piece goes over with recipients. Timing and targeting, messaging and medium — done right, they are sure to take a campaign a long way.

As this issue shows, creativity might get you even farther.

VOLUME 4  
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2008

06



14



# CONTENTS

## IN EVERY ISSUE

- 02 EDITOR'S LETTER
- 04 FEEDBACK
- 05 LEADER COLUMN
- 30 LAST WORD

## DEPARTMENTS

### 06 Ads Everywhere

Though still being tested, tray table advertising aboard airplanes is giving marketers an unlikely channel for reaching a captive crowd.

### 08 Demo Graphics

A concise look at some of the nation's most compelling market segments: This month, Asian-American consumers.

### 28 High Marks

We break down the key components of a tw telecom mailer that not only stands out to recipients, but also, literally, stands up.

## FEATURES

### 09 Master Pieces

Eye-catching mail pieces often wind up hanging on walls and other places long after the offer has expired. Can brands benefit from this?

### 12 Spreading the Floor

Flooring manufacturer BuildDirect used mazes made of its high-end bamboo to promote convenience and value to business customers.

### 14 Audience Participation

Sure, Hollywood and Broadway may seem to be all glitz and glamour. But marketing movies and plays is tougher than you may think.

### 18 The ECHO Grows Louder

Vying to increase entrants in its ECHO Awards competition, the Direct Marketing Association crafted a new campaign that has marketers taking heart.

### 20 Premium Channel

Cable network HBO captured viewers nationwide with a mock invitation to a wedding between one man and his three wives.

### 24 Open Secrets

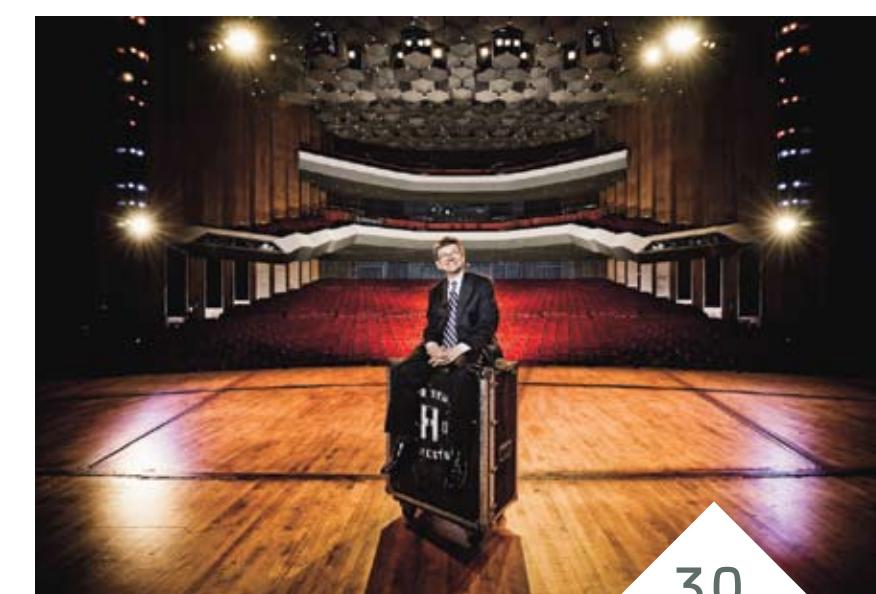
Two legends of direct marketing explain how to get more customers to open the mail you're sending them.

### 26 Divided Attention

Toys "R" Us provides a valuable lesson on how to expand into new markets without sacrificing the loyalty and affection of current customers.

COVER BY  
JAMES VICTORE

JUPITER IMAGES / RETOUCHING BY GECKO IMAGING INC.



30

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## PASTURES GREEN

This issue of *Deliver* (Vol. 4, Issue 2) was my favorite so far, because it tackled an important issue, "going green." I like the creativity that goes behind reinventing the way we market stuff. For many marketers, paper has been what we know. But getting our point across through more earth-friendly means will only mean a better future for us all.

— *Stephanne Cuento*

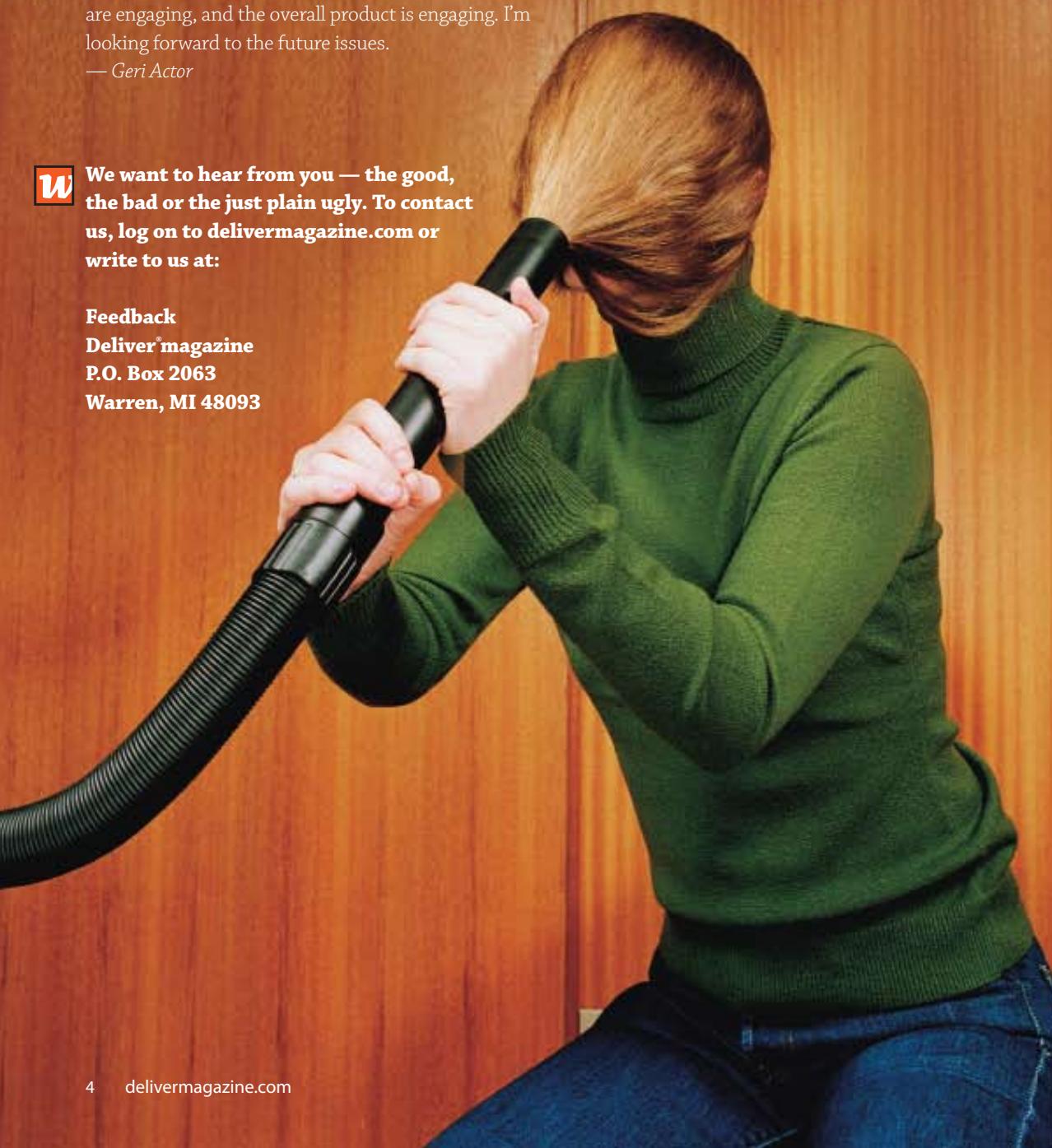
## GRIPPING TALES

I just finished the July issue of *Deliver* magazine (Vol. 4, Issue 3), and I want to commend you on putting together an interesting, relevant read. The stories are engaging, and the overall product is engaging. I'm looking forward to the future issues.

— *Geri Actor*

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## LEADER COLUMN

### THE "AND" ECONOMY

*Why the old lines of demarcation in marketing are, thankfully, starting to blur*

BY JOSEPH JAFFE

**We live in an either/or world** — be it left or right brain; church or state; branding or direct response.

The reality is, however, that there is no line anymore that divides one bucket from another, one department from the next or one consumer from a brand. Instead of a dichotomy of extremes, perhaps we need to consider a different paradigm, one in which "and" replaces "or," where balance and equilibrium take precedence over a binary or mutually exclusive outcome. I call it the "and" economy.

Not long ago, I gave a keynote speech about the "and economy" and highlighted the following points:

- *If we can't measure it, it isn't real.*
- *Branding without direct response is negligent while direct response without branding is naïve.*
- *New does not replace old, and old should not dominate new — but this is no excuse to get sucked into incrementalism.*
- *Consumers and marketers work as partners, not adversaries.*
- *Consumers reject silos of all shapes and forms.*

In this new methodology, the direct marketing industry has a major role to play and it is not inconceivable that the often subservient direct response capability could become a lead — if not *the* lead — in the integrated marketing communications space. Why? Put simply, direct marketing is built on measurability and accountability.



*Joseph Jaffe is president and chief interruptor of crayon, an advisory group.*

That said, the direct response space is also going to have to simultaneously learn to balance short-term gain with long-term benefit. At a time when the "tipping point" dovetails with the "long tail" in DNA-like strands, direct mail will similarly morph and intertwine with a conversational layer of community, dialogue and partnership.

Where direct mail was once either an outreach tactic or a fulfillment mechanism, marketers must now consider whether it can be both, whether mail can help them balance push and pull. The B2B space understands this all too well. There, platforms of sustained thought leadership are counterbalanced with lead-generation tools like white papers, consultations, starter kits and instructional DVDs.

(It's also in this same spirit that marketers must strike a yin-and-yang balance between electronic fulfillment and traditional mail, an effort that will prove to be as much art as science.)

There is no distinction anymore between above- and below-the-line. Soon, there may be one real line remaining: the one between status quo and innovation.

The question then becomes simple: Which side of the line will you find yourself on? **D**



**If well done, [tray table advertising] might be quite useful in terms of capturing the undivided attention of passengers who can afford air travel, which is not so easy these days."**

— NANCY MICHAELS, FOUNDER,  
GROWYOURBUSINESSNETWORK.COM

# The Upright Position

Why tray table advertising aboard airplanes could send your brand's image soaring

**Siamak Taghaddos was strapped in his airplane seat** on a shuttle from Boston to New York when he lowered the tray table in front of him. Instead of the traditional putty-colored surface he expected, the tray top revealed a colorful, imprinted surface with a commercial message.

The CEO and co-founder of GotVMail Communications in Needham, Mass., thought this would be a perfect place to let prospective customers know about his company's telephone services. "Our main customers are a very affluent set of entrepreneurs who travel a lot," says Taghaddos. "If our ad was [on airplane tray tables], they would see it and realize what we can do for them."

Last year, New York City marketing firm Brand Connections licensed the patented system — which wraps tray-table surfaces with a removable printed plastic sheet — and began showcasing it on one major U.S. airline. Each sheet includes one to three advertisements occasionally mixed with editorial from content partners. The program will be rolled out on a European carrier later this year, says Brand Connections CEO Brian F. Martin. He expects to add another domestic airline next year.

Advertisers can make a national buy, which Martin says produces 20 million impressions per month, or they can purchase a portion of the fleet. Typically, he says, advertisers buy a quarter of the fleet for a few months at a time. GotVMail purchased trays for two months on the entire shuttle fleet, which makes daily stops in Boston, New York City and Washington, D.C. He estimates that the \$300,000 buy netted him about 5 million impressions. While advertisers can buy a portion of the tray table space, "each plane is category-exclusive to an advertiser," says Martin. So companies don't need to worry about appearing next to their competition.

Airlines have long been an effective marketplace for the well-heeled, with opportunities that include in-flight magazine advertisements and video placements, says Nancy Michaels, founder of GrowYourBusinessNetwork.com and co-author of *Off-the-Wall Marketing Ideas: Jumpstart Your Sales without Busting Your Budget*. "If well done, [tray table advertising] might be quite useful in terms of capturing the undivided attention of passengers who can afford air travel, which is not so easy these days," she says.

Michaels says that savvy marketers will want to ask about some key issues, including how well the tray table wraps stand up to wear and tear and what results other companies have achieved through the program. Marketers could measure effectiveness with a specific call to action, such as responding to a special 800 number or visiting a Web page created specially for the promotion.

Taghaddos isn't certain how many new customers he got directly as a result of this promotion, but says he'd do it again for the exposure to key prospects. "The small business, entrepreneurial market can be hard to target," he says. "The feedback that I did get told me that people read our ads and that this was an effective branding effort for us." **D**



# The Asian-American Market

**Despite the tremendous upside** to ethnic marketing, marketers have been rather slow to embrace it, perhaps viewing it as fraught with perils and pitfalls. But that's starting to change. Even as they are making careful inroads into the Hispanic market, marketers are also turning their attention to Asian Americans.

And no wonder: although Asians only represent 5 percent of the U.S. population, they are among the most educated and affluent U.S. consumers. But the Asian-American market, with its multiple sub-groups and diverse languages, remains a challenge to most marketers.

Because so many companies don't address the Asian-American market directly, the opportunities to build relationships and cultivate loyalty abound. Indeed, according to Saul Gitlin, EVP of strategic services at Kang & Lee Advertising, Asian Americans may represent one of the true "last frontiers" of first-mover advantage for brands in the United States. "(This market) offers a fairly uncluttered environment," says Gitlin.

### YOUTH MUST BE SERVED

Looking to court younger targets? As a group, Asian Americans are one of the youngest slices of the U.S. market. Census figures show that the median age among Asian Americans is 34.8 years. Meanwhile, the rest of the U.S. population has a median age of 36.2 years.

### SPREADING THE WEALTH

Though they are largely concentrated in three states — California, Texas and New York — Asian American consumers nonetheless wield significant spending power. According to a University of Georgia study, Asian Americans spent \$459 billion on products and services in 2007.



### HOT WIRED

Asian American consumers are among the most active in the digital world. For instance, e-mail use on mobile phones is higher among Asian Americans than among any other group. Nearly 52 percent of Asian American adults who use the Internet bank online — as compared to 47 percent of the rest of the U.S. adult population.

### OPEN TO SUGGESTION

Marketers should seriously consider direct mail when reaching out to Asian Americans. Even though Asian Americans are more likely to buy luxury electronic items and keep up with advances in electronic communications, they're also affected by direct mail. Direct mail influences 22 percent of product purchases for Asian-American respondents.

### BRAIN POWER MEETS BUYING POWER

Educated consumers are almost always a coveted group, and Asian Americans tend to be among the most schooled customers in the United States. About 48 percent of Asian Americans have earned a bachelor's degree. Meanwhile, they are also the most affluent group of Americans, with a median household income of \$63,900.



# Master Pieces

Some direct mail is so eye-catching, it borders on fine art. But does it generate business? **BY NATALIE ENGLER**

**A year ago**, Brea Olson, a marketing manager in Denver, received a direct mail postcard that caught her eye. Promoting an offer from online shoe retailer Piperlime, the card was designed to look like the green citrus fruit. Olson doesn't recall her exact response to the message — but she knows that she couldn't ignore it. A year later, that lime-shaped postcard still hangs in her kitchen.

Lin Ennis knows this experience well. A decade back, she stumbled across a direct mail postcard with the word "create" printed across it. Ten years later, its offer long since expired, that

card still adorns her office wall. "It's tattered now," she says, "but I seem unable to part with it."

Olson and Ennis aren't alone. In offices and homes across the country, mail pieces initially designed to pitch an offer or service have become something more than just another piece of business communication. For many recipients, these pieces

are something deeper, richer, more inspiring. No longer just an ad, they are also viewed as art.

We're not talking just a crude illustration or generic stock photo designed to elicit a passing chuckle, either. Rather, many of the pieces that

**Express Cards:** Renowned art resource Corbis inspires and engages with its popular BrainBran postcards.

endure are created by respected artists and fully intend to do more than just prompt a purchase decision. While almost any mail piece can catch someone's eye for any reason, the pieces that last due to sheer artistic brilliance are almost always intended to do so.

Writer and designer Alison Macmillan has kept several direct mail postcards because they provide inspiration for her own marketing campaigns, she says. Among them is an ad for a water filter, with a photo of a girl in 1950s-style clothing; a nursing-services piece celebrating art and soup; and a mailer from an eyewear store that she saved because "the colors draw me in, as does the sultry look of the model in dark glasses."

What recipients also see — weeks, months and even years after the marketing message has lost relevance — is a constant reminder of the company that sent them this irresistible bit of mail. And while evidence about the influence of highly artistic pieces is largely anecdotal, it's still clear that a brand can get an unexpected boost by having its name or logo affixed to a wall for years purely because of the aesthetic appeal of a mailer.

There are plenty of companies that invest in visuals that they hope will outlast the immediate message of a mail piece.



As part of its campaign to recruit more seniors, retirement community Westminster at Lake Ridge mailed postcards (above) celebrating the work and lives of two of its noted resident artists. Below, more cards from the BrainBran campaign.



Some are companies you'd expect — such as art houses, graphic design companies and other visual-arts businesses. But there are also other major businesses, from retirement communities to big-city dance troupes, hoping to win over consumers with visuals that go beyond just a generic stock photo or crude illustration.

## Return on Artwork

The first, most obvious payoff from the use of high-level artistry in a mailer is that the piece becomes more likely to capture

potential respondents' attention. The right images can help differentiate a direct mail piece from competitive mailings, says Kacy Cole, vice president of marketing at Corbis, a Seattle-based resource for advertising, design

and media professionals worldwide. "Using imagery in direct mail campaigns helps convey a complex concept or idea in a glance," she says. "Using quality imagery helps a campaign stand out."

Recently, Corbis launched an initiative it calls BrainBran,

which includes both an online and hard-copy component. The direct mail piece consists of a pack of 24 cards, each featuring a single and thought-provoking image along with a brief statement ("Remove the technology") or question ("What's the emotional motivation?"). The cards, which can be ordered from the company's Web site, are designed to help stimulate ideas among creative professionals while also promoting Corbis as a fount of smart thinking, resourcefulness and eye-grabbing art. Just as significantly, they are designed as keepsakes.

Of course, you'd probably expect an art supplier to invest heavily in direct mail images that art lovers would want to keep. You might not, however, expect a popular retirement community to make a similar stake.

That's what happened, though, when strategic marketing agency Creating Results launched a campaign for Westminster at Lake Ridge, a continuing-care retirement community. Creating Results sent 10,000 double-sided, full-color postcards to retirees. The 6-inch by 10-inch postcards spotlighted two resident artists — a photographer and an award-winning painter/sculptor — and displayed images of their work along with details about their lives.

"Getting older doesn't mean you have to stop pursuing your passions," says Karen Pitts Baugher, director of public relations for Creating Results. "The vibrant artwork helped us show that Westminster at Lake Ridge gives you the time and freedom to live a vibrant life." The campaign even inspired a reporter for a local paper to write about each featured artist.

In the weeks after each mailing, visitors to the Westminster Lake Ridge Web site roughly doubled, Creating Results reports. Calls from new leads surged as well, and the community's occupancy rate of 96 percent was the highest ever.

Individual artists can benefit from an artistic approach to direct, too — especially when they are savvy about their mailing lists. When a Houston-area dance company showed the artwork of internationally recognized artist and designer Pablo Solomon in connection with an April performance, Solomon advertised the show with a postcard displaying one of his sculptures.

But he not only sent the mailer to prospective attendees, he also used it as an opportunity to reach out to past and potential business associates, gently reminding them of his existence. This targeted mailing resulted in several new opportunities, he says. For example, when he sent it as a "thank you" to the company that makes the particular product with which he sculpts, the company made him a spokesman.

And a mailing to critics he met several years ago when he did promotions for an art-related television series as well as a few local fine arts institutions and retail establishments led to several new artistic collaborations. Meanwhile, a poster-sized version of the postcard was hung at the theater complex where he was the featured artist. As it turned out, Houston Grand Opera shared the complex that night, so he also received inquiries about doing graphics work from opera-goers.

## Different Strokes

But can a direct mail piece be too arty? Although beautiful mailers catch the attention of creative types, does investment in eye candy make sense for everyone?

Not necessarily, caution direct marketing experts. The value of aesthetics hinges on the industry, the audience and the message, they say. "We are a visual society," observes Thomas Lamprecht, creative director of Hacker Group in Seattle. "We rely on our eyes more than any other sense, so visuals in marketing are important." But he points out that we are also an Internet society, accustomed to finding pertinent information immediately — so if the visuals are fabulous but the message is muddy, your beautiful work may end up in the trash.

Hacker Group, which has created campaigns for numerous brand-name companies, occasionally compares the impact of an art-intensive execution of a campaign with a plain version. What they've found: Art tends to produce more bang for the buck when marketing an "object of desire," such as real estate or motor vehicles, Lamprecht says.

Among the firm's successful art-driven campaigns was one for a motorcycle manufacturer. Each direct mail piece displayed a digitally enhanced view of a

motorbike, but in full and detailed view. The imagery focuses on "romanticizing" the product and is aimed at intense fans of the machines. In this case the art, says Lamprecht, "is purely about the product's aesthetics and sex appeal."

Appearance-related industries also benefit from pronounced artistry, says Joy Gendusa, founder and CEO of PostcardMania, a direct mail marketing company in Clearwater, Fla. Among those industries: dentists, day spas, art galleries, plastic surgeons, high-end landscaping, salons and home improvement companies. "Any time you are selling beauty, you have to have a beautiful card," she says.

Some high-end services companies may benefit from beauty as well, but for different reasons. Tammy Mangan, director of marketing for Sterne Kessler Goldstein & Fox PLLC, an intellectual property law firm in Washington, D.C., says, "We've made superior design a part of our normal course of business because we believe it defines and reinforces our brand." She adds that by using inventive imagery the firm aims to mirror the creativity of its clients, which are often tech companies.

Corbis' Cole notes that for some health care and financial services companies, lifestyle images, showing people conveying emotions or connecting with friends and loved ones, can engage customers and help them identify with the product or service.

But for other financial planners, physical therapists, cleaning services, plumbing, appliances and other services firms, gorgeous design may be counterproductive. In these industries, humor tends to be more effective, says Gendusa, who has produced over 688 million postcards with around 70,000 designs over the past 10 years. In addition, she says that anyone trying to reach a financially conservative or low-income audience should be especially wary of coming across as slick or snobbish.

"Gilding the lily is one of the pitfalls of direct mail," contends Steve Goebel, the creative director for MassMedia Inc., which is based in Las Vegas. "If you focus too much on the art and not enough on the call to action, you're just making art for art's sake. There's a place for that."

Of course, if you manage to make that great art relevant to your message, the place for your mailer just might be on someone's office wall. D



For a FREE\* sample of how you can make your mail stand out, visit [delivermagazine.com/standout](http://delivermagazine.com/standout).

\*While supplies last.

# SPREADING THE FLOOR

A building-materials manufacturer gets creative with its product samples and expands its market in the process

BY VICKI POWERS

**How do you move your company** into a totally different market? It helps if you can identify the pain points of your new prospective buyers, and then graphically demonstrate how you can remove that pain. And if you can do it with a sample of your own product, well, even better.

That's the approach that BuildDirect took when it mailed out a "dimensional" maze on its bamboo flooring product to illustrate both its product and its non-traditional approach.

Historically, BuildDirect's business-to-consumer (B2C) market represented a purely online effort — mostly search marketing and paid affiliates. The organization figured that prospects in the B2B market were less likely to be online actually searching for building supplies. So BuildDirect, a Canadian company typically serving the do-it-yourself audience, relied on a clever direct mail campaign to attract the business-to-business (B2B) market comprising flooring distributors who resell to retailers and large builders.

"In their world, they have folks approaching them through trade shows and salesmen on the road," says Rob Davidson, vice president of marketing at BuildDirect. "That's not consistent with our online business model, so we thought direct mail would be a good way to reach out to these prospective commercial buyers."

As a result, BuildDirect's direct mail maze campaign was one part of a more comprehensive campaign packaged in a box as a dimensional mailer to 350 presidents/CEOs at flooring-distribution companies. (Another tier of 5,000 smaller companies received a flat mail piece.) The wooden maze actually consisted of two mazes, side by side. The traditional maze on the left represented the plethora of twists and turns that customers needed to navigate when sourcing through a traditional channel. Flooring materials often come from overseas, which involves foreign currency issues, excise taxes, customs and tariffs, so the maze included such landmarks as "lost at sea," "damaged goods," and "missing paperwork."

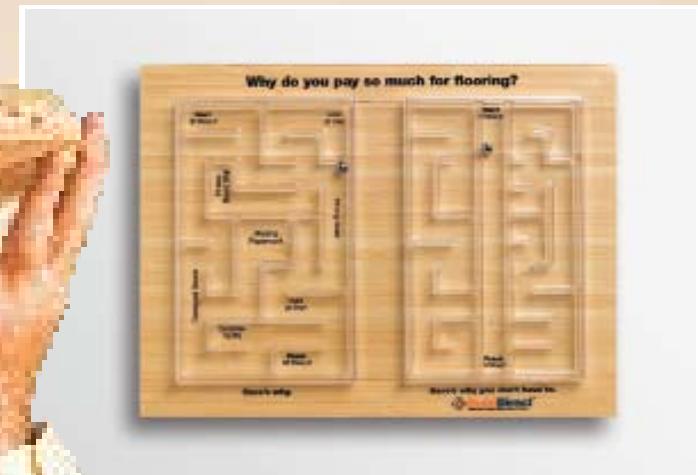
The contrasting "maze" wasn't labyrinthine at all, but rather featured a straight track along which the ball moved simply up and down. This was meant as a visual metaphor of how BuildDirect was taking a lot of the hassles and costs out of the buying process for these commercial buyers. "If you source through BuildDirect, it is basically one call to BuildDirect and a straight line to distribution," Davidson says. "As a subtle point, we put the whole thing on our bamboo flooring, one of the products we sell."

The maze campaign garnered a 16-percent response rate through reply cards, e-mail and even phone calls. Davidson says they were pleasantly surprised with these results as a non-traditional player in

a traditional industry, and that the piece really stuck in the minds of recipients. "People at trade shows continue to comment, 'You're the guys that sent the maze,'" he says.

Davidson credits a key part of the campaign's success to the quality of the list. His department initially rented highly targeted lists and worked with a telemarketing firm to determine the right contact and match at each organization. They whittled the list to a smaller number of companies against which they were prepared to make a bigger investment with a direct mail piece.

"I also think the creativity behind the package is a reason for its success and for helping people understand the value proposition behind our business model," Davidson says. "It stood out in talk value. Direct mail can still have a big impact when it's done properly." **D**



Dual mazes sent out by BuildDirect playfully reinforce the company's value proposition.

CORBIS



# AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

BY VICKI POWERS

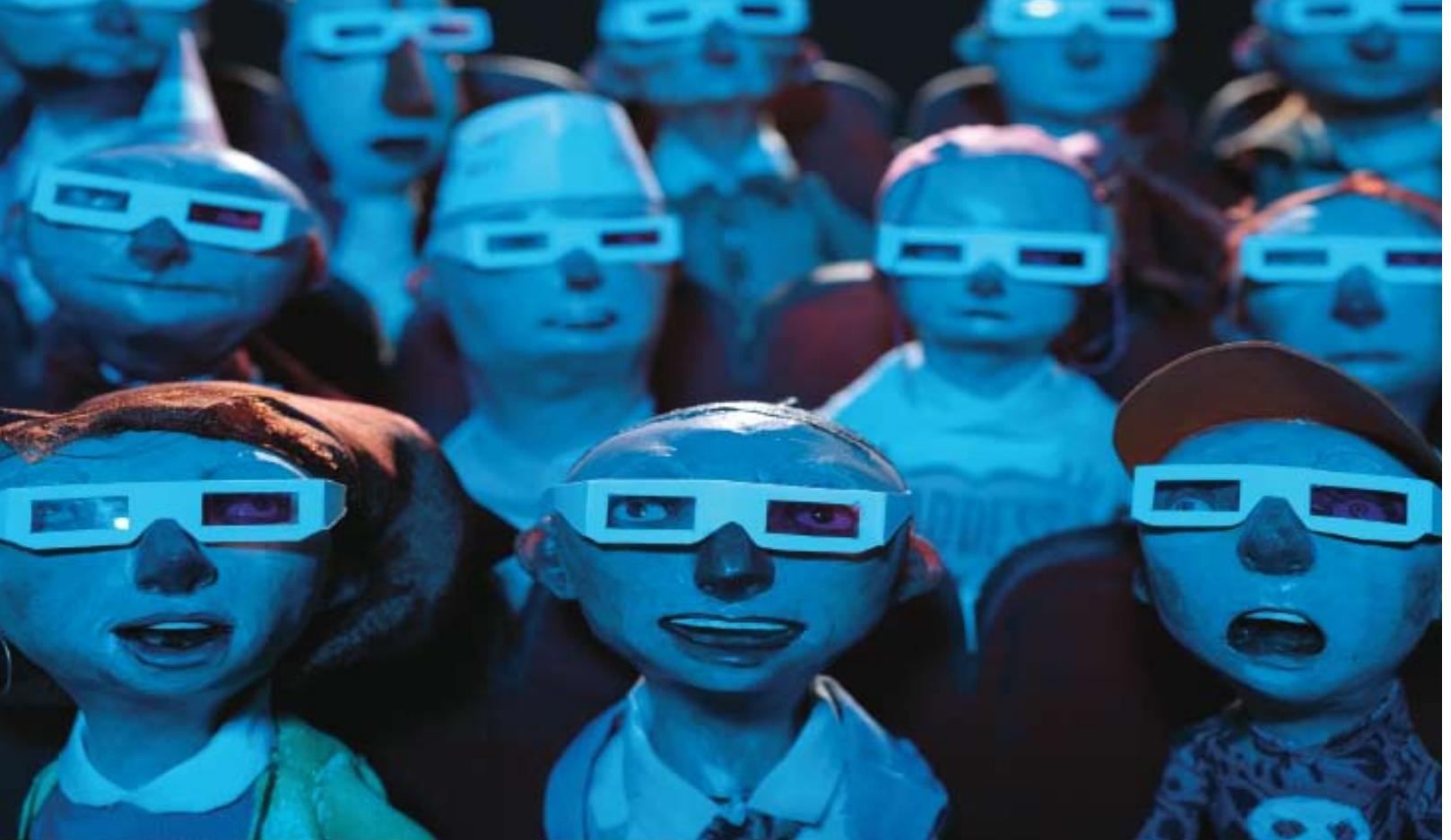
ILLUSTRATIONS BY RED NOSE STUDIO

What does your company have in common with a Hollywood studio? What can you learn from a Broadway show? A lot more than you might think.

**Entertainment marketing may seem** a lot sexier than, say, selling insurance or dishwashing detergent, but at heart it's really the same process, with many of the same challenges. Selling movies and theatrical productions isn't as simple as running TV commercials and newspaper ads. There's a diverse set of targets — the consumer audience, influential journalists and bloggers, industry-awards voters — and reaching each can require a completely separate marketing effort.

Also, each constituency influences the others: Audience members choose which movies to attend or shows to see based partly on what the critics and bloggers have to say. The awards voters watch both critical and audience response very carefully in making their selections. And a slew of awards can revive both movies and live shows at the all-important box office.

So you have an overlapping series of influencers, each affecting how the others see the product. Does this sound



like what's impacting your own business? If so, read on for three case studies showcasing how entertainment marketers reach the voters, the tastemakers and, finally, the end users themselves.

## THE ENVELOPE, PLEASE

For movies to garner awards, they first have to get the attention of the voters. "The essence of this marketing is getting voters to see the product," says Rick Markovitz, executive vice president at Hollywood-based Murray Weissman & Associates. However, extremely strict guidelines from the various groups that dole out major film awards restrict what movie studios can send to voters. The motivation for these restrictions is to try to create a level playing field for independent filmmakers in competing with the major studios.

According to one group's guidelines, a DVD "screener" must be sent in a package to members with no marketing or branding on the outside. So it can't be the retail version of the movie's DVD. In an effort to keep its membership from being overwhelmed with mailings, the organization doesn't provide its member list to movie studios, so the studios run ads in trade publications to collect current addresses. They ask members to fax in their address and membership card. Over the course of the film industry's anticipated "awards season," voters might receive 70 to 80 DVD mailings from different movie studios.

One successful recent campaign season came from an independent Canadian studio in 2005 in an effort to mass market a low-budget, powerfully written drama to the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) in hopes of securing SAG's Actor® and other major award nominations.

Murray Weissman, founder of Murray Weissman & Associates and a leading entertainment industry publicist, worked with the studio on this project. The key factor involved sending 100,000 DVDs of the movie through the mail to every member of SAG, the union that represents film and television performers nationwide. The entire active membership of Screen Actors Guild votes on all categories for the union's prestigious SAG Awards.<sup>®</sup>

Many award-worthy motion pictures are released near the end of the year to build momentum and potentially increase box office sales after a major nomination. Yet the Canadian studio's drama was released in May 2005, about eight months before that year's biggest nominations were announced. Although this meant voters would need a reminder of the film's existence, it also helped the studio save a bit of money.

"Mail campaigns are essential," says Weissman. "A lot of people felt that campaign resulted in winning 'Outstanding Performance by a Motion Picture Cast' at the Screen Actors Guild Awards." And that ensemble win, Weissman says, helped influence the races for other major awards: One group named the film its "Best Picture" in 2006 and awarded the movie two of its coveted golden statuettes in other categories as well. Weissman says that since then, other companies have followed a similar path to parallel success.

Although some movie studios are moving their marketing campaigns online as a "greening" effort to save resources, Weissman says that when it comes right down to it, he likes to sit back and watch the DVD screeners on his big-screen TV at home. "That's much more enjoyable than fighting traffic and sitting in a crowded theater as part of a private screening," he says.

## BLOG ROLLING

There's no question that movie critics are influential in the ultimate success of a particular film. But bloggers are increasingly gaining influence over the ticket-buying public as well. Which means movie studios have started adding the bloggers with the most site traffic to their lists of promotional-mailing recipients.

Often these mailings take the form of "swag": mugs, toys, backpacks, caps, travel bags, pens, T-shirts, stress busters, key chains, mouse pads, or anything else the marketing minds behind them can dream up. Chris Thilk, who writes the "Movie Marketing Madness" blog, thinks the success of such swag efforts comes down to recipients' being able to actually hold something, a form of interaction that's just not possible online.

"You can touch it, feel it, and it provides a more substantial reminder of the movie than you can provide online," he says. "It's also great for something that can spark word of mouth when you take that travel bag to a conference or put a toy in your office and get people talking."

For example, one studio sent out replicas of a hamburger-shaped phone prop used in one of its productions, while another sent milkshake coupons that recalled the final scene from a recent film. These efforts help proliferate industry buzz and ultimately help build movie momentum.



The direct campaign for the Broadway production of *Thurgood* helped garner revenue that was 2.5 times higher than mailing costs.

## MARQUEE VALUE

Each year, dozens of stage shows open in New York, adding to the number of long-running hits from previous seasons. While the most important factor in the success of any show is good word of mouth, recently theater marketers have been experimenting with ways to increase the chatter.

Jon Bierman, senior vice president at New York-based Eliran Murphy Group, a marketing and advertising firm specializing in arts and entertainment, has seen many changes during his 26 years in the theater advertising business. The most significant difference, he says, is the advent of direct mail for marketing Broadway. "Direct mail has changed the industry considerably," Bierman states.

Back in the early 1980s, Bierman says advertisers for Broadway shows placed ads in newspapers and hoped that the show sold. Now producers are a lot more aggressive about actively marketing to potential ticket buyers. "One of the ways we know we can do that is with direct mail and e-mail," Bierman says. "You just can't open a show today without those being an important part of the mix."

He says that in 1980, of the 62 shows that opened that season, 23 shows (37 percent) closed within two weeks. In 2000, though, only one show of 27 (4 percent) closed in two weeks. Bierman attributes that difference to the industry's increased use of direct mail and e-mail leading up to and during that critical post-opening time period.

The mail efforts tend to include discount offers on self-mailers or oversized postcards. "You want to have great creative, but it isn't so important to do something extravagant," Bierman says. A 30-percent to 40-percent discount decreases risk for less affluent theatergoers. With less risk, Bierman says, people will take a chance.

The key, says Bierman, lies in buying extremely targeted lists. A campaign for *Thurgood*, featuring a noted dramatic actor as the Supreme Court justice, sent pieces to 225,000 targeted theater-goers four weeks before the show's April 2008 premiere using lists from other African American-related Broadway shows. With a variety of black American stars and playwrights on Broadway now and in the recent past, Bierman says these lists performed superbly. Says Bierman: "It's still selling extraordinarily well and brought in 2.5 times our cost of mailing."

The 6-inch by 11-inch folded mailer offered a \$50 discount (nearly 50 percent off the regular ticket price) for performances during the first eight weeks. A couple of weeks after the show opened, the agency sent a repeat mailer to 125,000 multi-buyers (folks who have purchased tickets for more than one Broadway show in the past) as well as new ticket buyers from select lists. This self-mailer offered \$60 tickets for the next eight weeks and featured critics' quotes about Fishburne and award nominations he was already starting to receive.

While Bierman also relies on e-mail to market Broadway shows, he says he'd rather go with direct mail for its demonstrable results. He spends about 20 percent of the show's budget on pre-opening marketing through direct mail, and that spend generally decreases over time.

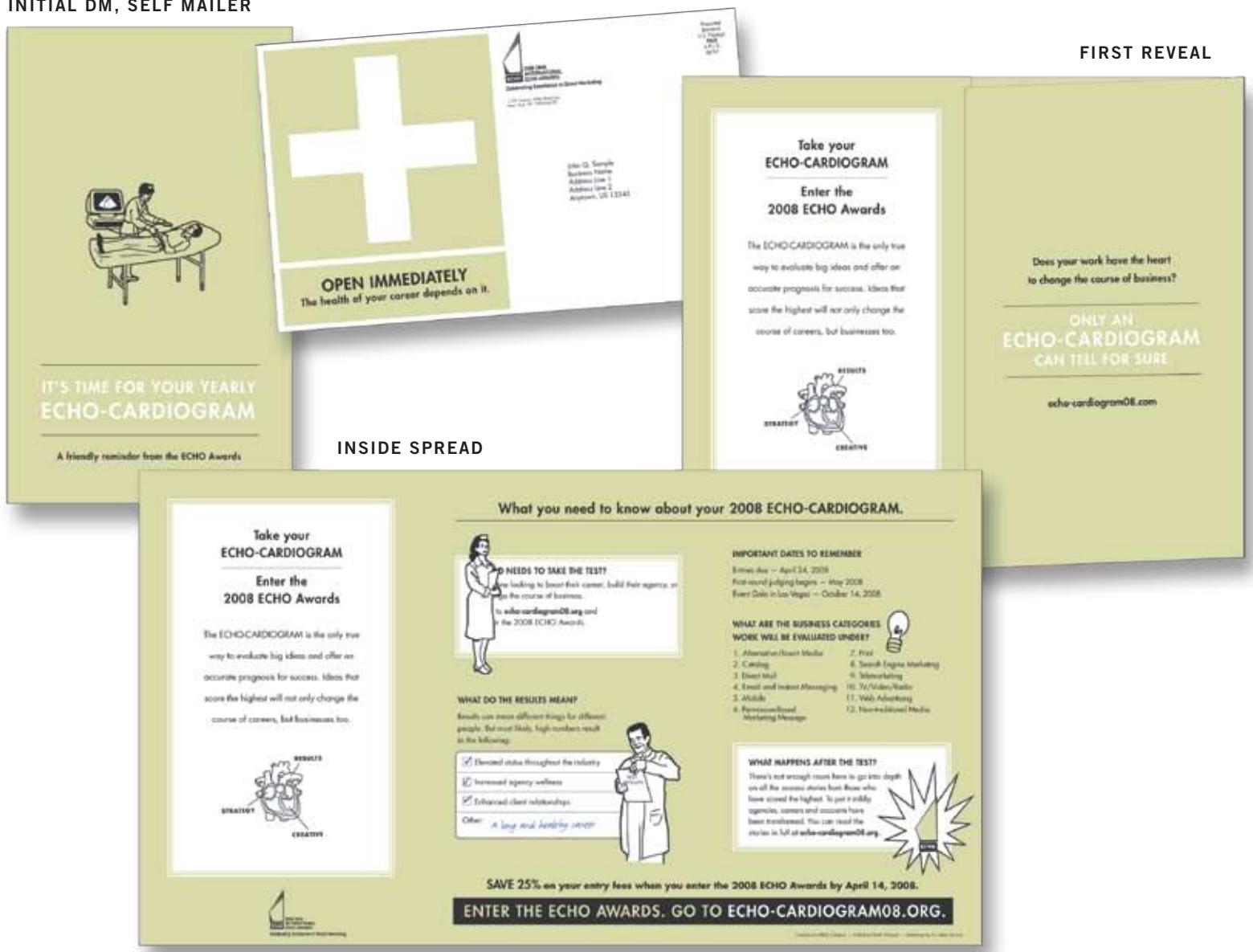
Direct also helps maintain awareness of a show throughout its run. Years ago, Bierman handled direct mail for *Proof*, which earned a 2001 Tony Award and the claim of longest-running play in 25 years. Throughout its run, Bierman says the agency mailed more than 1 million pieces as part of nine different campaigns. "Direct mail and e-mail helped extend the run," Bierman says. "Both for the word to get out at the outset, and keep it running longer, direct mail is a wonderful tool." □

# THE ECHO GROWS LOUDER

The Direct Marketing Association designed a new integrated campaign that is resonating with ECHO Award entrants

BY LARA JENSEN

## INITIAL DM, SELF MAILER



**Even competitions have competition.** And for the Direct Marketing Association, sponsors of the popular International ECHO Awards, the challenge to break through the clutter created by other direct marketing awards programs has prompted the DMA to develop some winning campaigns in its own right.

As a result, the efforts have added even more sizzle in recent years to the group's call-for-entry formula, says Barbara Parker, director of the ECHO competition.

Since the DMA decided a few years ago to increase promotion for the awards program, the creative agencies that the DMA has called upon to create the ECHO call-for-entry campaigns have been "given a lot of freedom to do things they couldn't do with other clients," Parker says. The reason is simple: Since the awards recognize creativity, it reflects well on the ECHO brand if the call-for-entry campaign is itself innovative.

The only real direction the agencies receive is that the effort should reach client, agency and creative people in the direct marketing field around the world and encourage them to become part the ECHO awards, which began in 1929 as a "Best in Direct Mail" contest.

The campaign typically consists of mail to 30,000 names, some e-mail, a Web site, and advertising in a number of trade magazines. Last year, a record-breaking 1,124 direct marketing campaigns vied for ECHO honors, including 650 entries in five new categories: e-mail and instant messaging, mobile, search engine marketing, Web advertising, and Web development. The DMA

**"By leveraging the ECHO name in 'ECHO cardiogram,' it was our way of validating a creative process that traditionally can't be validated."**

— RICHARD EBER, CHIEF CREATIVITY OFFICER, MRM GILLESPIE

expects the number of entries to be even higher this year and attributes the increase to the call-for-entry campaign.

Direct marketing agency MRM Gillespie developed this year's program, which rolled out in October and was built around the idea that the awards serve as a test, or "ECHO cardiogram," of the health of one's career. "By leveraging the ECHO name in 'ECHO cardiogram,' it was our way of validating a creative process that traditionally can't be validated," says Richard Eber, chief creativity officer at MRM Gillespie.

As part of that validation process, MRM Gillespie came up with an online test on the call-for-entry Web site that helps prospective entrants assess whether they have the right stuff to win an ECHO award. One of the questions was "How does one settle down when facing a deadline and a racing heart?" The choices were: meditation, look for another job, or indulge in a drug and alcohol bender. Those who clicked on the last answer received a poor prognosis for winning an ECHO.

The tone and visuals of the campaign as a whole convey "a sense of whimsy and a wink," Eber says. "We were trying to parody a medical exam." The central image is a vintage-looking medical sketch of a heart, with '50s-style graphics.

Eber explains that the online components to the campaign helped emphasize one of the key themes of the ECHO Awards itself: the push for integrated campaigns. "We really wanted people who are more digitally minded to enter," he says. This year's campaign featured a more in-depth online experience than in previous years, including a viral initiative that encouraged visitors to forward the ECHO cardiogram test to friends.

The site also featured examples of people who have won an ECHO in the past and how this propelled their careers. On the home page, clients, creatives and account representatives were directed to different areas of the site, where they were presented with material specific to their areas of expertise. MRM made this last distinction to help broaden the appeal of the awards beyond creatives. "Sometimes, only creative people participate in these shows," Eber says. As a result, visitors to this year's Web site stayed longer and clicked through to more pages than those in previous years.

Come this fall, the fun continues when the DMA throws its annual black tie-optional ECHO awards ceremony. "The ceremony is all about exposure and recognition," Parker says. "The competition is the 'back-room' stuff; the ceremony is the 'sexy' stuff."

Still, it's the creative direct marketing campaign that is driving excitement about this year's ECHO awards. Which is why the DMA will "continue to allow agencies to think outside the box and have some fun," Parker says. □



# premium channel

**If you plan to sell a TV show** about polygamy, it helps if you have a sense of whimsy. That's just what HBO employed to promote its recent "Big Love" series.

"We developed ideas to subvert some of the common conventions of marriage in a very light-hearted way," says Zach Enterlin, vice president of advertising and promotion for the premium cable channel. "We wanted to take the traditional relationship of one plus one and make it one plus one ... plus two."

That coupling of expected and unexpected — which Enterlin calls "fairly representative" of HBO's overarching philosophy for marketing its collection of groundbreaking shows — makes perfect sense for "Big Love," a fictional drama about a contemporary Utah family secretly living in polygamy. The story revolves around retail executive Bill Henrickson, his first — and legal — wife, Barbara, and his second and third wives through "plural marriage," Nicolette and Margene.

To promote the series' premiere in March 2006, HBO mailed formal "wedding invitations" to 100,000 prospects, mostly women. In elegant script, the invitations requested "the honor of your presence at the marriage of Barbara Dutton & Nicolette Grant & Margene Heffman to Bill Henrickson."

That introduction undoubtedly prompted more than a few double takes, but the following lines quickly clarified the real message: "[on] Sunday, the twelfth of March at ten o'clock in the evening

(nine o'clock in the central time zone), only on HBO." An insert — the type usually used as a wedding reply card — encouraged recipients to visit a special "Big Love" wedding microsite "to learn more about the happy couples" and enter a contest to win a Hawaiian honeymoon.

The high-quality pieces, mailed in matching envelopes addressed in calligraphy, looked like the real thing. That was no accident: "Authenticity was critical," Enterlin says. "We heard a lot of anecdotes about how people were fooled for a minute."

HBO built its mostly female "guest list" with names acquired through partnerships with popular consumer magazines and several wedding Web sites. Enterlin believes the invitations created a sense of strong community. "People who got one felt like they were in exclusive company," he says.

While there's no way to tell exactly how many recipients became "Big Love" loyalists, the invitations generated plenty of awareness about the series. "They became a phenomenon. They triggered a lot of chatter online and in blogs," Enterlin says. HBO also credits the three-week promotion with prompting at least 28,000 visitors to tour the microsite and 8,000 to enter the contest for the Hawaiian dream trip. He adds: "We consider it a great success when nearly 30 percent of the people we targeted with our direct marketing take the next step and log on to find out more about the program."

The invitations were part of a larger "Big Love" campaign with other efforts that, in Enterlin's

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How the most cutting-edge network on television used smart direct marketing to win over viewers

BY ANNE STUART

PHOTOGRAPH BY DEREK BLAGG

“ [The USPS® partnership] offered a really exciting chance to go beyond our traditional advertising platforms. We were able to use the footprint of the Postal Service™ to reach a truly broad audience.”

— ZACH ENTERLIN, VICE PRESIDENT OF ADVERTISING AND PROMOTION FOR HBO

## BY THE NUMBERS

Following are some results from the HBO-USPS® spring 2008 “Power of the Letter” campaign to promote HBO’s “John Adams” miniseries:

**Branded stamp cancellations:**  
3.3 billion pieces

**Branded banner ads on USPS.com:**  
45 million impressions

**Branded takeover of USPS home page:**  
1 million hits per day

**Branded USPS customer receipts:**  
225 million impressions

**Branded signage in 13,000 Post Office™ locations:**  
331 million impressions

SOURCE: HBO

words, “were fun and buzzworthy and broke new ground while communicating our essential message in a really accessible way.”

For instance, HBO ran ads in newspaper wedding sections with three side-by-side “marriage announcements,” each depicting Bill Henrickson with a different wife. In a Valentine’s Day promotion, HBO gave away heart-shaped chocolates labeled “His and Hers and Hers and Hers.” And for the first time ever, HBO advertised on wedding cakes, partnering with bakeries in selected cities nationwide to feature wedding cake toppers with a groom and two or three brides.

All those efforts raised strong public awareness about the show, says Enterlin, who ranks the Big Love campaign among his all-time favorites. “From a creative marketing standpoint, we also had a lot of fun,” he says.

### The Power of the Letter

Enterlin’s marketing team used a very different coupling of mail and marriage to promote “John Adams,” the spring 2008 HBO miniseries about America’s second president. The seven-part series, based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of the same name, describes the birth of the American republic from the viewpoint of one of its founders. It also chronicles the relationship between Adams and his wife, Abigail, who exchanged more than 1,100 letters in their courtship and 54-year marriage.

“Letter writing was a crucial part of their story and has some powerful scenes in the miniseries,” Enterlin says. That fact prompted the idea of a marketing campaign based on personal correspondence, and quickly led to an unprecedented partnership with the United States Postal Service.®

The partnership produced the “Power of the Letter” campaign. In the six weeks leading up to the miniseries’ premiere, HBO and USPS® invited consumers to visit a special Web site where they could create free greeting cards customized with quotes from John and Abigail Adams. The Postal Service™ sent the finished cards to customers, who could then write personal notes on them, pop them in prepaid envelopes and mail them to friends or relatives.

HBO initially planned for 25,000 cards, but quickly exhausted those and fulfilled another 10,000 requests, Enterlin says. HBO and USPS promoted the campaign — and, of course, the miniseries — with large window clings and standees in 13,000 Post Office™ locations nationwide. And for the first time ever, 225 million USPS customer receipts generated during the campaign carried a promotional message — a John Adams quote with an invitation to visit the “Power of the Letter” Web site. The same quote (“Let us dare to read, think, speak and write.”) appeared as a stamp cancellation on 3.3 billion pieces of mail sent during the campaign. (See “By the Numbers” sidebar.)

Enterlin says he was excited by the prospect of the USPS partnership. “It offered a really exciting chance to go beyond our traditional advertising platforms,” he says. “We were able to use the footprint of the Postal Service to reach a truly broad audience.”

Again, Enterlin can’t link a particular campaign tactic to viewer numbers. But thanks to the sheer size of the USPS customer base, the campaign attracted plenty of attention.

Says Enterlin: “Awareness of this campaign was truly very high, and there was a follow-on effect of great coverage in the press.” □

TOP: NOEL HENDRICKSON/MASTERFILE; GEAR INSET: JUPITER IMAGES

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## DOWNFALL OF DECEPTION

### DM veterans warn against trying to fool today's consumers

Despite stereotypes about marketers' willingness to say anything to win customers, the truth is that marketers are increasingly acknowledging the futility of trying to dupe consumers in these digital times.

Sure, you still get the occasional attempts at deception — the car dealership mail designed to look like an official IRS letter; the financial service company that prints "Important Information About Your Account" on an envelope containing only a credit-card promotion. However, most marketers

## OPEN SECRETS

.....A.....  
REFRESHER  
COURSE

### At a time

when the corporate world seems increasingly obsessed with digital solutions, legendary direct marketer Ernan Roman has some compelling news for brands: Recipients actually want your traditional mail.

Roman says that prospects and customers have been so overwhelmed with e-mails in recent years that the deluge has turned off many of them. It has also made them more receptive to mail.

"This started four years ago, and it has reached a crescendo over the last three years," says Roman, a 35-year marketing veteran who heads Ernan Roman Direct Marketing in Douglas Manor, N.Y.

Of course, despite the good news that customers are asking for your mail, you still have to persuade them to open your envelope. To help you do this, *Deliver* turned to Roman and fellow direct marketing legend Herschell

realize that, in an era of unprecedented consumer power, untruthful messages only undermine customers' confidence in their brands.

These tactics haven't completely died out yet. "In 2008, the brand is more important to direct marketers than it ever was before," says Neil Feinstein of True North Inc. "In 1978, we didn't care about the brand. We cared about the sale. The check in the mail created a sale. In 2008, that check in the mail creates a (mad) customer."

Feinstein adds that "as a consumer and a creative person, when I get a subscription notification that [looks like] a bill, I'm hugely furious."

Marketing veteran Herschell Gordon Lewis says that in direct, as in branding ads, heavy competition can fuel chicanery. In an industry where

Direct marketing wizards **Ernan Roman** and **Herschell Gordon Lewis** explain the science — and art — of getting recipients to open your envelopes. **BY BLAINE APPLETON GRANT**

Gordon Lewis, who started his career making gory films like "Blood Feast" and "2000 Maniacs" before turning to ad copywriting. Not surprisingly, both men know how to get attention.

Here are a few tips they have for those trying to capture mail recipients' eyes:

**Understand what mail is good for.** Make sure recipients are expecting something they can use. Customers of Roman's clients tend to prefer direct mail for important communications "that are relevant to the preexisting relationship," says Roman. He adds that "the customer is going to get cranky if you start chopping down trees for a message that doesn't have substantial value."

**Fulfill personal requests.** Use preference information from opt-in campaigns to your advantage on the outside of the envelope. For instance, Roman's company recently completed a campaign that encouraged viewers to name their favorite TV programs during the opt-in registration process. Using the consumer-provided information, Roman segmented the company's list and sent personalized promotions to the fans of various shows.

**Keep the envelope clean.** Generally, when sending high-level business information, keep your envelope simple — an address, a restrained logo and a personalized return address are all you need. Don't muck up the envelope with extra text, big logos or artwork.

**Help recipients make quick decisions.** If the product is relevant, but a commodity, says Roman, informational graphics and copy can help recipients prioritize the mailing's importance: "We're saving them time by letting them know about the product or offer on the outside of the envelope."

**Use the right words.** Many overused words insult recipients' intelligence. Lewis eschews the words "free" and "personal," which, at best, have little meaning — and at worst, incite consumers' cynicism and even anger.

**Avoid the "bulk-mail" effect.** Lewis recommends doing whatever you can to ensure that your envelope doesn't look like one of millions, whether it's an unconventional font or an eye-catching color.

In this age of consumer-driven marketing, there's no one-size-fits-all strategy that always will or won't work. You have to know your consumer well before you splash the envelope with promotional copy — or not. **D**

clients sometimes pit direct marketing agencies against one another on the same project, competitors may begin to think only in terms of response. "Long-term relationships are in eclipse," says Lewis.

But marketers who forget to consider both sales and relationships aren't doing their clients any favors, say experts. They are also giving fuel to those considering legislation to allow recipients to opt out of direct mail.

With talk about "Do Not Mail" legislation increasing, marketers can ill afford to anger mail recipients — especially when all most recipients are asking for is the truth.

**You can download the DMA's ethical guidelines at [dmareponsibility.org/guidelines/](http://dmareponsibility.org/guidelines/).**



# DIVIDED ATTENTION

Direct marketing helps retailers win over new consumers without losing focus on the old ones

BY LARA JENSEN | ILLUSTRATION BY SIMON SPILSBURY

**With competition for the consumer's** attention coming from all sides these days, retailers in search of new customers are facing more obstacles than ever before.

As traditional advertising vehicles like TV and print ads continue to reach progressively smaller audiences, "it is going to be harder for marketers to find new audiences going forward," predicts Kevin Hillstrom, president of MineThatData, a consultancy in Seattle.

And for all its vaunted reach, the Internet isn't always the best answer for acquiring new customers. "The Internet is good for finding existing customers who are at a certain point in the purchasing cycle where they are ready to buy from you again," says Hillstrom.

When reaching out to customers who may have never heard of a particular brand, the answer is often less high-tech. Direct mail vehicles such as catalogs allow marketers to pick and choose whom they want to mail to, providing a viable way "to speak to an audience that has never bought from you and stimulate or create demand," explains Hillstrom.

In 2007, for instance, Toys "R"Us Inc. tripled the circulation of its Toy Guide for Differently-Abled Kids to 3 million as part of an ongoing strategy to differentiate itself from other toy retailers. Although the toy store has produced the guide for more than a decade, the decision to push it more aggressively this year was made because Toys "R"Us wanted the guide available in its stores year-round, instead of just during the holidays, according to Bob Friedland, public relations manager at Toys "R"Us Inc. The guide is also being mailed to customers and distributed to national organizations for children with disabilities. The toys in the guide have been selected and evaluated by the National Lekotek Center, a division of Anixter Center that works with children with disabilities.

This isn't only a print effort, however. The guide is also available for download from a special Web site. In September, Toys "R"Us stores were also enlisted to promote the guide via dedicated boutiques showcasing products from the guide.

Such coordinated multi-channel efforts are what it takes to create a

successful new customer acquisition strategy. "A catalog strategy has to be part of a broader overall strategy" for a retailer to see an appreciable increase in sales, Hillstrom says.

Because most parents buy toys, the retailer's strategy to target parents of special-needs children seems natural. Sometimes, however, marketers look a little farther afield for new customers. These customers may not always mesh with the more established audience. If new customers don't match up in a meaningful way with a retailer's core audience, "there has to be a strong strategic reason to continue" with a new customer acquisition strategy, Hillstrom says.

Like Toys "R"Us, JCPenney has successfully reached out to new consumers. Throughout 2007, JCPenney targeted brides-to-be using catalogs, special microsites and co-promotions with David's Bridal and a major magazine publisher. The goal was to build the JCPenney gift registry.

"Getting that younger consumer in and converting her to a customer can help feed sales across the whole store down the road as these customers get older," Hillstrom says. Not unlike the toy retailer, JCPenney "is using as many advertising and purchasing channels as possible" to try to reach these new customers, Hillstrom adds.

JCPenney kicked off the initiative by updating the registry catalog and Web site and including a wider selection of merchandise. The site and catalog even featured a cast member of a hit TV drama.

In August, JCPenney launched a microsite that allowed brides-to-be to browse the JCPenney gift registry, create a wish list and set up a planning calendar. The site included a sweepstakes offering entrants

the chance to win a new kitchen, bed- or bathroom furnished with JCPenney items. Winners were to be featured in national bridal magazines and on the publisher's bridal Web site. In addition, editorial and promotional copy touting the site appeared in the bridal magazines.

Finally, JCPenney and David's Bridal, the nation's leading bridal retailer, teamed up recently to form a partnership. JCPenney serves as the exclusive wedding gift registry for David's Bridal customers. The partnership also includes in-store signage, e-marketing efforts, rewards programs and literature at more than 280 David's Bridal locations.

Hillstrom says that, though the best new customer acquisition strategies are "part of a holistic strategy to increase sales across an organization," outside factors such as attitudes in the local community can compel brands to alter their plans. A major retailer that acquired a landmark chain in Chicago in 2005 has found this out the hard way. After converting the chain's old stores to its nameplate, the retailer saw sluggish results from its attempts to win over long-standing customers of the old chain. Not long ago, the company shifted its focus, choosing to go after new customers, like the burgeoning population of young professionals in Chicago. Its efforts include a new wine bar, free wi-fi connections, a high-end toy retailer and themed shopping parties.

Still, promoting these efforts may be harder than the retailer realizes. "If the overlap in its database is high between its customers and customers [of the chain it bought]," Hillstrom says, "[the retailer] may be talking to customers who have already said no to it."

Even without such snafus, though, it's rarely easy to find new customers willing to say yes. □

# A Piece that Pops

tw telecom wanted its direct mail campaign to stand out. Faction Media did them one better — by creating a piece that stands up.

**When you're crafting a B2B** direct mail campaign, it's important that your piece has the ability to stand out on the recipient's desk. What better way to accomplish that than to have the piece literally pop up?

"We wanted to create a piece showing what makes Time Warner Telecom services different; how they can add a new dimension to your ability to communicate," says Aaron Batte, principal of Faction Media, which developed the campaign for Time Warner Telecom. (The company recently changed its name to tw telecom.) "We started by adding a dimension."

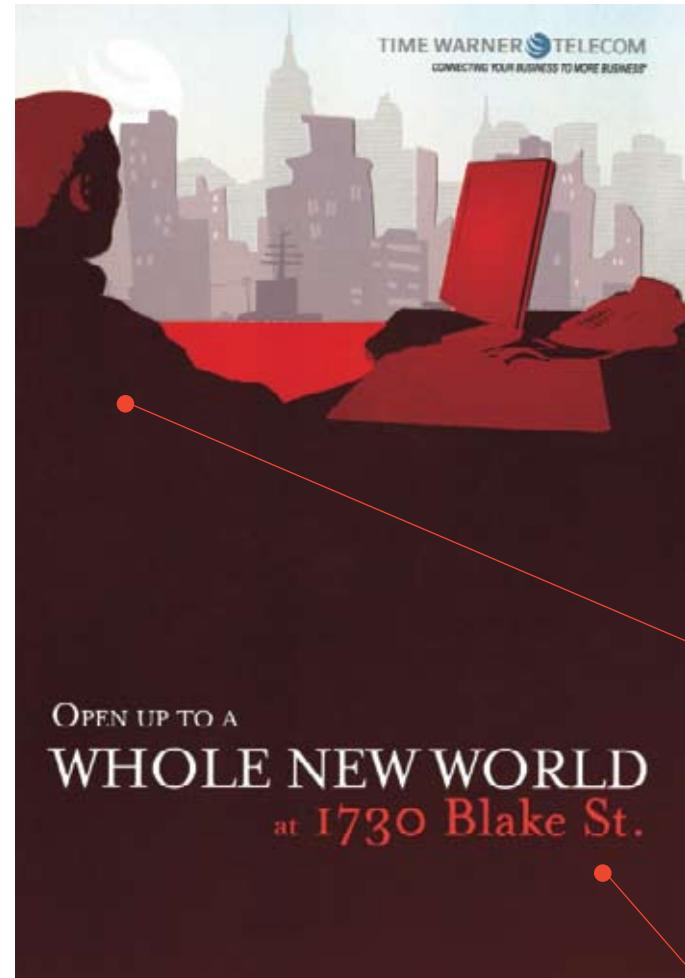
Based in Littleton, Colo., tw telecom provides voice, data and Internet services to business customers in 8,500 office buildings in 75 cities nationwide. Because those structures are "lit up" — that is, already connected to tw telecom's fiber-optic network — the company's spring 2008 campaign targeted other companies in the same buildings.

Specifically, Batte's creative team designed a 6x9-inch card that, on the outside, invites recipients to "open up to a whole new world" at their specific business addresses.

When they open the card, a three-dimensional city scene — complete with buildings, streets, pedestrians and a traffic signal — pops up. A prominently placed billboard offers an incentive, such as a free video camera, for making an appointment to discuss telecom service.

In the background — visible whether the card is opened or closed — is a city skyline customized with local landmarks: the Gateway Arch for St. Louis residents, the Empire State Building for New Yorkers, the Space Needle for those in the Pacific Northwest.

The campaign's response rate varies from city to city, but averages 8 percent to 10 percent, according to tw telecom. That's far



better than the typical direct mail response rate, which historically has been closer to 1 percent to 2 percent.

Why does the pop-up piece generate those kinds of returns? "It's a little larger, a little more eye-catching, a little more fun" than many direct mail pieces, says Batte. "People know there's a sales pitch in there, but this piece is saying, 'We're going to give you something back. When you engage with this piece, we're going to give you a bit of entertainment.'" □



tw telecom logo doubles as sun in customized skyline.

"Billboard" encourages recipient to set up an appointment to discuss buying telecom services in exchange for a video camera or other incentive.

Cityscape pops up when piece is opened, providing visual depth.

Silhouette provides recipients with "over-the-shoulder" perspective of looking through a window at their own city's skyline.

Introduction with customized business address invites recipient to open 3-D mailer — and "open up" to a new service.

Skyline is customized with familiar landmarks from recipient's city.

## THE ESSENTIALS

**Agency:** Faction Media, Denver [factionmedia.com](http://factionmedia.com)

**Client:** Time Warner Telecom Inc., Littleton, Colo. (now known as tw telecom)

**Target Audience:** Businesses in or near more than 8,500 buildings served by tw telecom's fiber-optic network in selected cities nationwide

**Goal:** To convince these potential corporate customers to buy tw telecom's voice, data and Internet services

**DM Vehicle:** A freestanding one-piece mailer whose outside cover invites recipients to "open up to a whole new world" at their specific business addresses. Inside is a three-dimensional city scene with a billboard and other text offering an incentive — typically a video camera — for making a sales appointment. In the background, visible whether the card is opened or closed, is a skyline customized with local landmarks (such as the Empire State Building in New York and the Space Needle in Seattle)

**Size:** 6 x 9 inches; mailed flat in clear 6 x 9 poly envelope

**Response Rate:** Averages 8 percent to 10 percent

# Harmonic Convergence

The Houston Symphony finds its direct marketing inspiration in some unlikely places

**Like many cultural organizations,** the Houston Symphony relies heavily on direct marketing to sell tickets, as ticket sales account for about one-third of its annual budget. The man in charge of the orchestra's ticket-sales marketing, Bruce Robinson, knows that acquiring customers means inspiring them. And that means being in touch with his marketing muse. Recently, Robinson talked with *Deliver* about messaging strategies, new technology and why a bug-covered postcard can stimulate the creative juices.

**DELIVER:** Where does mail fit into an orchestra's need to sell concert tickets?

**ROBINSON:** Orchestras once sold subscriptions mainly through volunteers. But for the past 30 years, orchestras have adopted more sophisticated tools for subscription marketing, with direct mail being one of the most important. The Houston Symphony executes marketing campaigns for subscription and single-ticket sales. In the case of subscription sales, direct mail and telemarketing are the two most important pieces of the strategy, with mass media a distant third. For single-ticket sales, it's an even split among direct mail, radio, print and newspapers.

**DELIVER:** Why is mail useful for selling tickets?

**ROBINSON:** One-half of 1 percent of the Houston population buys a ticket and comes to the symphony within a 12-month period. Since there's such a small target market, I can get to that target more cost effectively via mail than with mass media. The names in the Houston Symphony database are not lonely at the mailbox. They receive about 35 postcards a year promoting ticket sales, in addition to whatever fundraising mail they receive from the orchestra.

**DELIVER:** These days, what's the best way for mail to be effective?

**ROBINSON:** There is this old rule of thumb that the success of any mailing is derived 40 percent from the list, 40 percent from the offer

and 20 percent from design. So I did an experiment with this in mind. For one month, I separated all the direct mail I didn't respond to into three shopping bags: One bag for lists that were a bad match, one for offers that didn't work, and one for design that didn't work. In the end, I didn't respond to 60 percent of the mailings because I was on the wrong list, 35 percent because of the offer and 5 percent because of the creative. This tells me that the direct mailers who are successful are those who are mailing over again to the same customers with different effective offers.

**DELIVER:** Who is a really effective mailer in your opinion?

**ROBINSON:** I get a mailing from a high-end men's clothier probably twice a month. Each one of these has a different offer. It's not reinventing the wheel every time, but one time the offer might be "Buy one tie, get the next 50 percent off," while the next time, the company is offering me 10 percent off any purchase on a certain day and a share of the proceeds are going to a charity. The clothing company knows I'm a customer, and it mails me constantly.

**DELIVER:** Have you ever received a piece of mail that inspired you as a marketer?

**ROBINSON:** There was this postcard from an exterminator that was covered in bugs. The copy said something about a swarm of termites being headed toward Houston so you should call the company before it's too late. The fear elicited by that postcard, I'm sure, drove many people to action. Having fun can work, too. Every year, the Houston Symphony marketing department sends out a postcard reminding subscription holders that if they don't renew by a certain date, their seats will be given away. This year's postcard features a photograph taken at a concert, showing people rushing the concert hall. The copy reads: "They're after your seats." It cuts through the clutter to have something different.

**DELIVER:** Is your marketing department doing anything differently today from a couple of years ago?

**ROBINSON:** The big steps we've taken include better list management, using modeling, and profiling using aggregated data. We're now able to identify potential prospects not already in the database. The first time we used modeling to reach prospects, we mailed postcards offering two free tickets to 200,000 names. The strategy cost about \$100,000. However, in the subsequent 18 months, those names generated \$280,000 in sales. So far, the symphony hasn't been as effective with e-mail as with direct mail, and my suspicion is that this is because mail is more interruptive. We've also used variable-data printing and have sent out personalized postcards. Certain mailings continue to be personalized. □



ROY RITCHIE

**Stage Presence:** Bruce Robinson, head of ticket-sales marketing for the Houston Symphony, says the orchestra is using customer data better to boost attendance.